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## Exploring the Research-Policy Linkage: The Case of Reforms in Financing Primary Education in Tanzania

Alf Morten Jerve

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E-mail: [alf.m.jerve@cmi.no](mailto:alf.m.jerve@cmi.no). The paper forms part of a larger comparative research project based on case studies from Kenya, Uganda, Malawi and Tanzania under the auspices of the Global Development Network and its programme on Bridging Research and Policy. The project was coordinated by the Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo. The author wish to thank REPOA, Dar es Salaam, and Joanita Magongo in particular, for assistance in preparing and conducting interviews and data collection in Tanzania.

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## Introduction

In late 2000 the President of Tanzania announced the decision to remove school fees in primary schools – known as the Universal Primary Education (UPE) fee amounting to Tsh. 2000 (USD 1.80)<sup>1</sup> annually per pupil – as from January 2002. This was a popular but, to most observers, surprising move. It did not mean that primary education from then on would be free, but still this decision represented somewhat of an ideological turning point retreating from the established paradigm of the necessity and desirability of cost sharing in provision of essential public services – such as basic education. The decision was seen by many in the NGO community as an ideological victory, taking one small but vital step towards the greater goal of free quality education for all (Maarifa ni Ufunguo 2001). This article is not about explaining why this policy change took place, although it forms parts of our background. The focus is on the role of research in the process, and more specifically research in Tanzania and primarily by Tanzanian scholars.

This case study forms part of a larger project to study the use of what we call *domestic research-based knowledge* in contemporary policymaking in four African countries (Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda) with a particular focus on key policy-initiatives emerging from or merged with processes of writing national Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS). In our case, Tanzania's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) presented to the World Bank/IMF in 2000 as part of the conditionality for debt relief became a platform for announcing the decision on school fees. We shall document that the role of domestic research in the making of this new policy was surprisingly marginal on two important accounts.

Firstly, there is little in terms of quality empirical research looking into effects of costs sharing policies and user fees in education, and the research there is tends to emphasise other causes to why children are not in school than unaffordability to pay school fees. Secondly, indigenous scholars were not actively mobilised in the process. Could it be because many were known to be sceptical to a simple populist decision to abolish user fees? That they voice their concern with yet another step towards increased aid dependency?

The removal of so-called nuisance taxes has its appealing short-term win-win logic – a win for tax payers, a win for the politicians, and only a marginal economic loss to government (some even argue that the costs of collecting these taxes exceed the revenue). In the longer term, however, as several Tanzanian scholars argue, such decisions make it more difficult to build a sustainable financial base for quality primary education. In this article we shall offer our explanation of why there is this tenuous link between research and policy in this special case, and, more generally, why preconditions for evidence-based policy making are as much political as they are scientific.

## Historical background

The development of primary education in Tanzania has gone through a series of distinct phases reflecting major shifts in macro policies and development paradigms. Independent Tanzania (1961) inherited an educational system available only to a minority distinguished by race, economic position, geographical location, and religious denomination. There was a distinct urban bias.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the exchange rate as of mid 2005: 1 USD = approx. 1100 TShs

In the *first* post-independence phase, from 1961 to 1967, the educational policy was dictated by two major concerns. First of all, a national unified system was established. Racially segregated schools and schools for exclusive religious denominations were abolished. Tanzanians were free to enter any school. The second concern was to train a cadre of skilled manpower to replace the expatriate (and Asian) workforce in public service, which made Government prioritise secondary and higher education. The responsibility for primary education was mainly placed upon the local authorities. Hence, the expansion of the school system was slow and enrolment and literacy rates remained low. On the other hand the quality of education was good.

In the *second* phase, Tanzania swung towards a more socialist based and egalitarian education policy, as articulated in the Arusha Declaration (1967) and the Education for Self-Reliance policy (1967). The latter established the right to education of all citizens, and ushered in a major effort to expand the basic education system. The rationale was no longer gradual modernisation but one of wholesale and radical social transformation – the *ujamaa* doctrine, with the villages as the pillar. The role of the education sector was not only to produce skilled manpower for the modern sectors; its main role was to change peoples' mindset and to build a Tanzanian national identity, also among the many children who would continue living a traditional peasant life. According to Nyerere, the country's socialist goals could not be achieved when the bulk of the population remained illiterate.

This ideology was further reinforced with the Universal Primary Education policy (1974). Donor agencies responded favourably to this shift in policy and throughout the 1970s Tanzania witnessed a remarkable expansion of the system of primary education based on erecting simple school buildings in all villages and deploying "grassroots"-teachers with limited training. In 1981 Tanzania reported a gross enrolment rate as high as 98%. Net enrolment peaked in 1983 at 74% (Unicef 2002). The difference is explained by the enrolment of a large number of older children not in the recommended school age (7 -13 years in Tanzania).<sup>2</sup>

In the *third* phase, starting early 1980s and lasting up to the late 1990s, this achievement came to a halt. Enrolment rapidly plummeted in the 1980s, and in 1989 the gross enrolment rate stood at 78% and the lowest net enrolment rate was reported in 1991 with only 54%. There was no real improvement until 2002.

With the growing fiscal crisis in the aftermath of the war with Uganda, the second oil crisis, the failure of state-owned enterprises and the unchecked expansion of public sectors, Government's ability to foot the bill of running the education system was shrinking. This was also the time when donor agencies, with the World Bank and IMF at the helm, took to more interventionist policies under the label of structural adjustment. The Government of Tanzania resisted the new policy conditionality for some time, but eventually had no option but to accept the new orthodoxy on prudence in public financial management, which had implications on the policy for education financing invoking increased cost-sharing and privatisation. The factors causing the subsequent drop and flattening out of enrolment have been subject to much debate, but are surprisingly under-researched.

Although we see major ideological shifts throughout these three phases from modernisation, to socialist and to market liberal rhetoric, the changes on the ground are less dramatic. In fact, education policy in Tanzania has been suffering from the inability of the system to translate policy statements into effective policy instruments and implementation strategies. "For instance, education

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<sup>2</sup> The *net enrolment rate* includes children of the recommended school age in school as a percentage of all the children of the same age in the population. The *gross enrolment rate* is based on all children in school regardless of age as a percentage of all children in the population of the recommended school age. Thus, the gross enrolment rate might exceed 100%.



for self-reliance policy remained as a political platitude until it was abandoned ... It is that skill in translating otherwise excellent policy statements into feasible educational practices which seems to be a critical missing link in Tanzania” (Omari 1994:16).

Despite two decades of socialist policies inequalities in access to quality primary education remained stark at the end of the 1980s. And despite the much heralded self-reliance policy the trend had been the reverse in the same period. The education sector received a higher share of the total Government budget in 1962/63 (20%) than in 1990/91 (12%). At the level of local authorities there had been a general decline in revenue collection, and a lack of priority to the education sector, with many districts spending less than 5% of their revenue on primary education. Hence, local governments became increasingly dependent on central government, and central government on international donors (Galabawa 1994).

The *fourth* and current phase begins in 2000 with the announcement in the PRSP-document of Government’s intention “in reversal of past policies ... to abolish primary school fees, starting FY 2001/2002”. This third paradigmatic shift in education policy since independence is less radical than in 1967 and early 1980s in ideological terms, but the combined effect of the resurgence of a rights-based approach to primary education and a shift in donor priorities towards social sectors definitely has led to a reemphasis of the role of the state in education. The state is rolled back in, to use a common phrase from the structural adjustment debate. In Tanzania, this is evidenced in the change in education financing policy backed by a USD 150 million World Bank loan financing a Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) commencing in 2002. This substantially increased Government’s commitment to the education for all agenda, politically as well as financially.

The antecedents go back to Tanzania signing the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) agreed in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and later reaffirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. The Dakar Framework of Action explicitly states:

Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are affected by rapid globalization. Achieving EFA goals should be postponed no longer. The basic learning needs of all can and must be met as a matter of urgency.

The Forum made a collective commitment, later to be adopted as one of UN’s Millennium Development Goals, to ensure “that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality”.

While the condition in the education sector in the 1980s and 1990s best can be characterised as paralysis, Tanzania nonetheless grappled with two genuine dilemmas. How far can a poor state take the responsibility for free public services? The austerity of the country’s economic situation and its low level of revenue generation simply ruled out a “free for all” policy. Then, how far should aid compensate for shortfall in revenue generation?

Seeing a gradual deterioration of the educational system policy makers, and researchers as well, called for more selective investments, cost sharing mechanisms and better incentives for mobilising community participation and the private sector. Justin Galabawa, today one of Tanzania’s leading education policy experts, started publishing in the mid-1980s. His views at the time are illustrative of how the problems were perceived. “There is a limit to which the central Government can depend

on fiscal resources solely from tax revenue to finance education. The burden of educational costs, therefore, must be shared between the central Government, local authorities, voluntary agencies, parents, students and the community” (Galabawa 1991:47). Those who can afford to pay should pay, even though Government is ambivalent. “It had gained popular acclaim through policies to abolish fees; but now it is embarrassed because fees have crept back into the system” (p. 45).

In actual fact, parental contributions and school fees have been part of primary education ever since colonial days. Government did abolish fees in 1974, but introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) contribution only three years later. Adding costs of school uniforms, text books, writing materials and various ad hoc contributions in cash, kind or labour, education has never been free to Tanzanian families. There is, however, no definite picture of levels of costs. Direct costs in the form of cash payments and contributions in terms of food have in one study been estimated at between Tsh. 5.000 and 10.000 (USD 4.50 to 9.00) per pupil per year depending on class level (Maarifa Ni Ufunguo 2001: 27). Adding indirect costs, such as uniforms, shoes, utensils and in some cases transport, average annual expenditures to parents for keeping a child in primary school is said to be around Tsh. 50.000 (USD 45) (Maarifa Ni Ufunguo 2001, United Republic of Tanzania 2001a).

Coming 2002 we see a remarkable upswing in primary school enrolment. Enrolment in Standard I increased by 43% from 2001 to 2002 to 1.6 million pupils. In 2003 the figure fell back to 1.5 million, for reasons not fully understood (URT 2003). Enrolment in Standard II, III and IV, however, continued increasing. Removing the Tsh. 2000 UPE fee lowered the financial hurdle experienced by many poor households for sending their children to school, but probably more important was the political campaigning following PEDP stressing *compulsory* primary education. Visible improvements at school level – e.g. buildings and text books, and a remarkable increase in the number of secondary schools at the same time makes investment in primary education more attractive to parents.

To what extent was the decision to remove school fees evidence-based policy making, backed by knowledge on what works for Tanzania, or to what extent was it rather determined by political doctrines imported by Government (much like in 1967) or imposed on Government (as in early 1980s)? It is essential to understand the role of the Tanzanian research community in the process when attempting to answer this question. Senior Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) officials claim that “(i)nitially, the policy formulation process was dominated by the ruling party. From the early 1990s to date the situation has changed. Policy formulation in the education sector has become the responsibility of Government officials, experts, and professionals” (Kalegula and Pambe 2002:10). Does it involve Tanzanian researchers?

## Theoretical approach

In a review of literature on the use of knowledge and research in policymaking Sutton (2001) identifies four different schools. These are not mutually exclusive and may apply in different measures to a particular policymaking arena – internationally, nationally, sectoral or sub-national. There is (1) the *rational model*, involving comprehensive evidence-based analysis where knowledge is seen as neutral and apolitical; (2) the ‘*muddling through*’ model which sees a much more marginal role of knowledge with decisions being incremental, pragmatic and based on compromises between influential actors, and introduces the concept ‘satisficing’ for this type of process; (3) the *knowledge utilisation school* which sees knowledge as cumulative and advocates that authoritative knowledge gradually will prevail and have influence on policy; and (4) the *policy paradigm school* which sees a role of research in shaping paradigms – i.e. an overarching set of ideas that serves to

define problems and policy instruments appropriate to resolving them (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001). Such paradigms may have their distinct supporters in what some scholars refer to as 'epistemic communities' of scholars and key civil servants. Paradigms not only influence policy, but also the other way around.

There has been in recent years a growing concern with the wide gap between what is perceived as state-of-the-art knowledge about development processes and the type of policies being articulated and enacted. The two-way traffic between policymakers and research communities is constrained by several factors; policymakers are not interested in research findings or only selectively (mis)interpret research to substantiate already preconceived ideas, research is not policy relevant, or even when it is, is not delivered in forms accessible to policymakers. These problems seem to be most acute in developing countries with a weak research infrastructure and a culture of personalised policymaking, subject to the vagaries of shifting international pressures. Terms like 'evidence-based policy making' and 'knowledge management' have become popular with many influential development agencies, reflecting a desire to move towards a more rational and scientifically based process of policy making. This is also reflected in terms like 'best practice' and 'lessons learned', and the proliferation of guidelines and tool kits for various fields of policy development and practice.

Two basic perspectives underpin this emphasis on knowledge utilisation. Firstly, there is the argument to anchor national and local policies more firmly to particular evidence about what happens in a country, especially to the poor and underserved. Bridging this type of research and the process of policymaking would yield more realistic and better targeted policies, it is assumed. Such research-based evidence is often not available or not based on sufficient scientific rigour. Hence, strengthening *domestic* policy-relevant and user-oriented and participatory research is called for. The second perspective is based on a more universal perspective of knowledge. It is argued that knowledge from one country has relevance in other settings. This view is particularly evident in the writings and policy advice emanating from the World Bank and many of their global critics, as well. They tend to prescribe similar reforms to a wide range of countries, also in the education sector, supported by comprehensive documentation and analysis of experiences across countries (Lauglo 1996, Burns et al 2003).

We are concerned in this article with the possible tension between these two perspectives – i.e. the use of domestic and particular knowledge versus international and comparative knowledge. Many would quickly dismiss this as an irrelevant question, since the latter should be based on the former, but it does make a difference where on this continuum from local to global knowledge influential paradigms are anchored. Looking at the role of research in relation to the reform in 2000, we find differential impact of these two arenas of knowledge production, with the latter as more influential. We argue, as our case illustrates, that this is the most likely outcome in aid dependent countries.

Comparing policy processes in Tanzania, and many other aid dependent countries, with those of politically and economically stronger countries, one major difference can be observed. Referring to the policy paradigm school, there seems to be in aid dependent countries a higher propensity of paradigm shifts in the policy process. This is what Hall calls *third order change*, and takes place when minor adjustments within the established policy framework (i.e. first order or 'satisficing') and major adjustments (i.e. second order) no longer satisfy dominant political actors (Hall 1990). It is a situation where new ideas from outside are brought in. Research plays an important role in developing alternative paradigms, but other actors make them politically relevant.

Use of research in politics is often in the form of a narrative, which is a 'story' of causes and effects outlining a particular development trajectory, such as the claim that universal primary education is a prerequisite for broad-based economic development (see Burns et al 2003 for a brief summary of

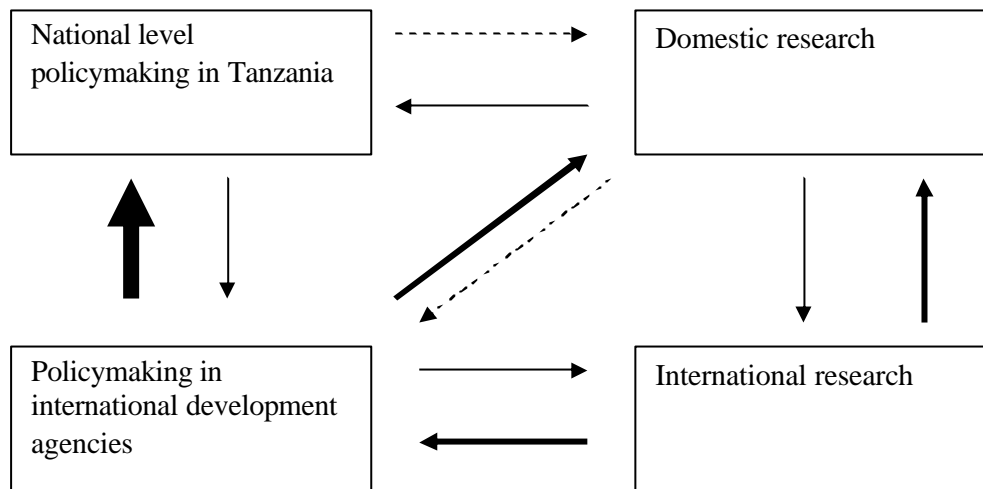
research-based arguments). A good example of this is the Participatory Poverty Assessment of Tanzania (2002/03) which in its report on education very explicitly presents its “conceptual framework” in terms of such a narrative or development paradigm. It sees “the power of education” in breaking the cycle of poverty and vulnerability and concludes: “To address concerns of vulnerability, the focus needs to shift from debates about how to ensure that marginal groups get equitable access to quality schooling, to how to ensure that the power of education is mobilised to reduce vulnerability” (TzPPA 2003: 34). International development agencies and their policymakers seem to have a particular affinity to development narratives, as they create some order in an otherwise chaotic world and justify uniformity in strategies across diverse countries and settings.

According to Stone, “policy-making under policy paradigms is characterised therefore by long periods of incremental change, punctuated by brief periods of major change” (Stone, Maxwell and Keating 2001: 7). This is however not a linear, rational policy process where the shift takes place after careful evaluation of the existing paradigm and development outcomes and scrutiny of alternative options. Policy processes are better understood as chaotic processes influenced by intentional behaviour of influential groups, knowledge packaged in different shapes and fashions (as narratives and discourses) and accidental events (Sutton 1999). This is also described as ‘muddling through’ as opposed to a rational and knowledge-based process. A consequence of this is that decisions are pragmatic and often conservative. They are the outcome of negotiations between organisational forces that seek to satisfice rather than maximise their goals. In many countries and sectors such processes may result in “long periods” of stable and reasonable predictable and successful processes of implementation, which has not been the case in Tanzania.

Hence, to examine which factors triggered the 2000 reforms in primary education, and the role of research-based knowledge, we will have to understand better what happened in between the paradigm shifts. This leads us to another feature of policy processes in Tanzania namely the gap between policy as ideological statements and policy as implementation. Typically, each new phase in education policy in Tanzania was announced by ambitious proclamations of major change and policy reorientation, only to be followed by a disappointing inability to translate ambitions into action. There are some variations from one phase to another, but except for the achievements in terms of enrolment following the UPE policy (1974), there has been little of first and second order change based on incrementalism and gradual modification of policy. Inertia may be a better description. Issa Omari, another leading Tanzanian education expert, made the following diagnosis: “Currently policies are made in a reactive fashion, often when there is a crisis while policy making is supposed to be a continuous process of adjusting intentions to the realities of the day” (Omari 1994:19). He criticises the tradition in Tanzania of ignoring resource constraints in educational planning. Is this a valid criticism also in the PEDP-period?

Understanding linkages between domestic research and policymaking in a country like Tanzania, we have to take into account that there is another research-policy linkage that might be far more significant and also more influential on the Tanzanian scene, namely the link between international knowledge production and international development agencies.

In the figure below we present the two research arenas – the domestic and the international, and the two arenas for policymaking – the national and the international. The size of the arrows indicates our main hypothesis with respect to scale and direction of influence on national policymaking, namely a marginalised position of domestic research relative to international research as and when the latter forms part of new paradigms of development agencies. The figure should not be construed to mean that national policy making is entirely dictated by international agencies. There are many other factors not related to research that influence policy more, as argued in the ‘muddling through’ model. This figure only deals with research-based knowledge as a factor.



In this study we adopted a methodology combining literature review (see bibliography) and semi-structured interviews with a sample of key informants in Tanzania (see appendix). The sample covered researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders (donor agencies and advocacy NGOs). By triangulating documented research outputs by Tanzania-based scholars with perceptions of key informants on use of domestic research-based knowledge we were able to test our hypothesis.

## Why are children not going to school? Evidence and arguments on cost-sharing presented by researchers in Tanzania

Our investigations revealed two surprising findings. Firstly, there are apparently very few studies from Tanzania of the effects of cost-sharing in education. Intuitively one would have expected a wider interest in this issue because of its controversial nature, and the global concern with effects of structural adjustment. The second finding relates to researchers' views on the 2000 reform. Most of them in fact disagreed with a blanket removal of the UPE fee. Although there are merits in the arguments that targeted exemptions would be difficult to administer and little revenue was collected in the first place, researchers were concerned about yet another move which undermines self-reliance at local as well as national level.

These observations are indicative of the role of the Tanzanian research community. During the decade prior to the reform it failed to produce research of direct relevance to the new policy discourse which gradually was unfolding, much influenced by external pressures and spurred by Jomtien. There is an apparent lack of independent, critical, researcher-initiated research, while commissioned research, which dominates, becomes too constrained by the current political agenda and the lack of good empirical data. The research findings and recommendations that do exist from the 1990s largely confirm rather than refute the paradigm of the structural adjustment period: Tanzania cannot do without cost-sharing and user fees in the education sector.

The research community was not able to influence the discourse, and was marginalised. “The University checked out in the 80s”, as one interviewee commented. While the University of Dar es Salaam gradually ceased to function as a critical independent institution with little research beyond consultancy work, the Ministry (MoEC) for its part never took the initiative to involve research. Its own Research Coordination Unit never functioned (Kalugula, interview), and the Ministry did not commission any new empirical research, only status reports linked to the elaborate process of planning a multi-donor Education Sector Support Programme (ESDP) (Buretta, interview).

There is no tradition for knowledge-based policy making in Tanzania, and most politicians and senior bureaucrats have viewed the research community with a lot of scepticism. This is improving somehow lately, with the emphasis on analytical work in the PRS-process (Mukai, interview), but has not prevented a feeling among all senior educational experts interviewed of not being listened to. In their view, the Government changed its mind on the UPE fee only after the World Bank had changed its view. And as one observer sharply commented: “World Bank never listens to indigenous thinkers”. But what was there to listen to?

## Evidence in published documents

At a World Bank donor conference in 1989 Galabawa argued that more community involvement and cost sharing is essential to avoid fiscal crises. Recognising a need to reallocate more of Government’s resources to benefit low income groups, he recommended reallocating funds from tertiary and secondary education to primary education, establish special grants for the poorest districts, and “transfer the burden of financing to those groups that benefit most through the use of fees” (Galabawa 1991:48).

In 1990 a National Task Force on Education was appointed to review the problems of the sector and propose policy solutions. Different from the previous national commission on education (the Makweta Commission, working from 1979 to 1982) this one was less political, chaired by a technocrat – Professor Mosha, Dean of Faculty of Education at University of Dar es Salaam. According to Omari, the Task Force produced a very analytic report but with overly ambitious policy statements with little consideration for resource availability (Omari 1994). The new Education and Training Policy which finally came out in 1995 was even less precise in terms of policy instruments, and it reconfirmed the ruling paradigm: “the reintroduction of school fees and direct costs in primary and secondary schools and subsequent liberalization of the establishment and management of schools” (United Republic of Tanzania 1995:90). Although the Policy acknowledges that the unit cost for primary education in Tanzania is half that of other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa there is no proposal in line with Galabawa’s recommendation to reallocate resources in favour of primary education. Besides promulgating cost-sharing and privatisation, the section on education financing merely states that “Government budgetary allocation to education shall be enhanced” and “District, Urban, Municipal and City councils shall institute a tax rate to finance basic education and training” (United Republic of Tanzania 1995: 93). The latter was never implemented and the removal of school fees from 2002 was in fact a step in the opposite direction.

Few empirical studies are available from Tanzania which could inform decisions on how to revise and fine-tune cost sharing mechanisms. TADREG published in 1993 the first study which addressed cost sharing in primary education as an issue. The study covered 16 villages located in 15 districts. 82% in the survey agreed with the statement: “More parents would send their children to school if they thought their children would benefit from schooling”, while 59% disagreed with the statement: “People like me cannot afford to send their children to school these days”. The report concludes that it is not so much the costs as the absence of any tangible returns to the expenditure involved

which discourages parents sending children to school (TADREG 1993:21). A major issue emerging from the study is misuse of resources. Parents complain that their contributions are mainly consumed by the council administration for non-educational purposes. While it is often argued that the problem is Government's financial crises, mismanagement and lack of accountability is an equally serious constraint.

Omari (1999) concludes that education financing in Tanzania is highly regressive favouring the rich households and communes. Not only is there an increasing number of children who are in local elite private schools or studying in neighbouring countries, but there is an alarming disparity in quality among public schools. In Dar es Salaam you can move from "middle class elite public schools, with clean and well fed children in neat uniforms well provided classrooms with windows and doors, a full complement of lively teachers, and organized school environment" to "dusty, windowless and doorless schools, with empty classrooms and malnourished children" (Omari 1999:97).

The article reviews the relationship between education and income at household and national level and firmly concludes that improvements in educational standards boost national economic growth, citing World Bank cross-country comparisons (Omari 1999). At household level standard of living surveys show a marked correlation between poverty and low level of education. The World Bank in 1996 concluded that in Tanzania education is one of the strongest determinants of household income and welfare (World Bank 1996). However, the causality goes both ways. Poverty determines access and pursuit of education, in as much as educational achievement enhances opportunities for livelihood improvement. Where does this take us in terms of financing strategies?

The World Bank financed Community Education Fund used the principle of matching parents' contributions to their primary school. In addition, the experiment included a mechanism to counteract inequity in economic status of communities. These were categorised as below-average, average and above-average. For the poorest category of communities the project would double the matching grant and for the average category raise it by 50%. The richest communities would receive only equal the amount of what it contributed. In a study of this experiment, Mpango and Mushi (1998) concluded that despite these measures of equalisation the facility reinforced patterns of inequality benefiting most schools with relatively richer parents.

Furthermore, the study found three main reasons why parents do not enrol their children in school or allow them to drop out: (1) low level and unreliability of household incomes; (2) the significant contribution of school-age children to household income; and (3) traditional values which are biased against the education of girls. "This is contrary to the assumption [by the designers of the project] that parents do not enrol their children in school simply because they regard the quality of education to be poor. Thus it is unlikely that school enrolment can be improved simply by improving the quality of schools" (Mpango and Mushi 1998).

In an article on access and equity in basic education in Tanzania, Malekela and Ndeki (2001) mention the issue of fees but are not able to assess the importance of this factor beyond the statement: "Although no studies have been done, it would seem the majority of those who drop out come from low SES [socio-economic status] as parents of these children need their children's labour and often fail to pay for the school expenses" (Malekela and Ndeki 2001:127). They report low enrolment and high drop out in areas where child labour is in demand, such as in mining and sisal plantations.

Although Mbilinyi (1999) claims that "many studies" have confirmed adverse consequences of cost sharing, we do not find that the bibliographic references provided actually substantiate the adverse effects she is listing:

- Children have been removed from school or never enrolled
- Children have been sent home
- The poor have had to reduce spending in health and nutrition in order to finance education
- Teachers' already packed work schedule is further burdened by the administration of user fees
- The relationship between parents and schools has worsened
- Equity goals are undermined

Her list may be intuitively correct, but appears not to be backed by solid empirical research. Furthermore, she makes a claim there was “a dramatic drop in enrolment and drop-outs after cost-sharing”. This does not correspond with the statement that cost sharing in primary education was adopted in 1993 (Mbilinyi 1999:23). By then, the drop from the peak 1981 level had already taken place. Parental contributions in various forms have existed throughout (the UPE fee was introduced in 1977), but aggregate costs to parents begun increasing in the 1980s. At the same time there was a decline in the ability to pay and in perceived benefits of primary education.

Where the research community had failed to contribute to the cost-sharing issue, advocacy NGOs tried to fill the gap. Two reports, in particular, made an impact on policymakers and donors – the first prepared by Kuleana in 1999, with support from Unicef and the second in 2001 by Marifaa Ni Ufunguo, supported by Oxfam. The former is a synthesis of existing evidence about the state of education, while the latter is the first comprehensive study of cost sharing in education in Tanzania. It is worth noting that the Kuleana report does not argue for a wholesale abolition of school fees. “While there is a role for cost sharing in education, its feasibility needs to be carefully considered, with attentions paid to equity concerns such as parental capacity to pay. Blanket cost sharing should be avoided as it is likely to severely affect the poor, reversing gains in enrolment and lowering attendance” (Kuleana 1999:30).

The study by Maarifa Ni Ufunguo was conducted in Kilimanjaro Region, rightly recognised as the better off region in Tanzania, but one which has been suffering badly from the slump in the global coffee market. The report concludes that cost sharing “is not working in terms of generating the funding at community level required to provide an even adequate quality of education ... neither is cost sharing working in terms of accountability” (Maarifa Ni Ufunguo 2001:57). There is a need to consider the whole range of costs incurred by parents as direct fees, a better understanding of indirect costs, and how problems with collection, management, and accountability for money generate confusion at local level, undermining confidence in the overall system, the report argues. It supports the decision to remove the UPE fee and calls for a “clear strategy ... of how to finance the gap which will be left”, but offers no recommendation to what this would involve.

The Education Sector Country Status Report published in 2001 (United Republic of Tanzania 2001a) is the most comprehensive synthesis of available literature. The main findings concerning enrolment and quality of primary education are:

- The level and quality of staffing – e.g. higher teacher-pupil ratios and better qualified teachers – encourage enrolment.
- A declining trend in villagers' commitment towards public schools. They are increasingly being seen as part of Government and the sole responsibility of Government.
- Parents' preparedness to participate and contribute towards school expenses is a major variable in explaining variations in unit costs for primary education. In other words, with the low level of Government funding per pupil in primary schools increased community contributions will make a substantial difference.
- Rural-urban differences are significant. 13 of top 20 districts are urban when looking at Primary School Leaving Exams results.



- Great variation in household expenditures on primary education. The richest 20% spend six times more than the poorest 20%.
- A flat rate subsidy scheme favours the richest families in urban areas.
- Great regional variation in enrolment rates. Dar es Salaam, Iringa, Kilimanjaro and Mara show net enrolment rates from 78% to 68%, while the national average is 57%. More than half of regions fall below the national average.
- Private returns to education are high, with the highest for higher education (23%) and lowest for primary education (10%). Higher education is highly subsidised by the state.
- In areas/schools with high student achievement there is noticeably greater support from parents and the local community, including financial resources.
- The contribution of district councils to financing education, using locally generated revenue, is very low.
- Average annual parental contribution per pupil in primary school is estimated at Tsh 48,000.

From this complex picture emerges an education system with enormous inequity, reinforced by community and parental contributions. Probably, the main problem of the school fee to most households was not the amount of money involved but the fact that it was not used to improve their school. The Status Report shows that local resource mobilisation will remain an essential determinant of quality education. Therefore, if the saving on school fees is not used to directly support the school or ones child in school, also among the poor, inequity might be further exacerbated.

It is of interest also to look at a study published after the removal of school fees, such as the Tanzania Participatory Poverty Assessment, and how it explains the response “of the many of the parents who immediately enrolled their children in school as soon as the main burden of fees was removed in January 2002” (TzPPA 2003:10). The study implicitly endorses the argument that costs to parents of schooling prevented children from being educated, but offers no concrete evidence. Rather, the study concludes that it is very hard to disaggregate responses to education by livelihood group and describes three patterns emerging.

One pattern is: “People who opt to invest are those who can afford to wait for the return, and by and large, they are not the poorest in any community” (TzPPA 2003:21). This is the opportunity cost to child labour argument, which is more related to the level and sources of income in a household than the costs of education in itself. Hence, as documented in the Kilimanjaro studies (Maarifa ni Ufunguo 2001 and 2003), declining income among coffee farmers resulted in lower attendance in school, the main reason being that children became engaged in alternative income generation. Problems of paying school fees were parts of the picture, but not the main reason.

Secondly, the study found: “Where the pull of the home, community, and a different set of values, often towards informal education, is strong, rejecting poor quality schooling is more likely” (TzPPA 2003:21). This is a combination of two arguments. On the one hand there are large groups in Tanzania that still do not value “modern” education. With Government not strictly enforcing compulsory primary education, as was the case in the 1980s and 1990s, parents simply had other priorities for their kids, whether they could afford school expenses or not. The other argument relates to the quality of the school environment. This pattern confirms findings in previous studies (TADREG 1993) showing widespread disillusionment among parents with declining quality. The response of some parents, notably the educated elite, has been private alternatives, while others simply accepted low attendance, truancy and drop out.

And the third pattern is: “Where parents have never seen the benefits of education, they are less likely to prioritise it for their children” (TzPPA 2003:21). The study consistently refers to virtuous circles of livelihood improvement and vicious circles of increased vulnerability, and the danger of widening the gap between the two. Education has the power of reversing the direction of the circle, it is surmised, but how to solve the Catch 22 situation implicit in the pattern above: low education results in low education? Compulsory schooling is one element of the strategy, but how to ensure benefits of education for the many? The system of financing education is obviously a critical factor, but again researchers are vague in terms of recommendations.

The study is not able to reconcile two key arguments running parallel in the report. In statements such as: “(a)bolishing cost sharing in primary education was a massive assistance to many poor families” (TzPPA 2003:31), it is implicitly argued that Government should provide free/inexpensive education to all. When the study poses the question: “(h)ow to finance the sector sustainably without donor dependence and without obligatory community contributions?” (TzPPA 2003:32), it accepts the fact that Government with its current sources of revenue cannot alone meet the costs of quality education. Finally, it is worth noting that the TzPPA study warns against seeing enrolment rates and completion rates as the main indicators of success for the education sector, “as schooling is compulsory, and it seems likely that some parents are enrolling their children in school because they have to and not because they particularly want to, early drop outs may also be more due to the pressures of multiple impoverishing forces rather than a comment on dissatisfaction with the education service” (TzPPA 2003:33).

This takes us to the core of the cost sharing debate, which is further reflected in the interviews summarised below:

- A compulsory and equitable education system must be backed by a financing system not subject to the vagaries of community voluntarism and donor funding.
- Quality improvement and expansion of the primary education system depends on increased levels of revenue generation.
- How to ensure that those who can afford pay more (in taxes, fees or contributions) and those without means are (temporarily) exempted, while still benefiting from the same education system?

## Views expressed in interviews

Most of the interviewees acknowledged that there was a lack of studies looking into the effects of cost sharing in primary education. Wangwe (interview) said that a main reason was lack of money for this type of critical research. Since Tanzanian academic institutions have virtually no funds for own-initiated research, they depend entirely on donors and the agendas set by them and “nobody gave money to look at negative effects of cost sharing”. It was advocacy NGOs that first tried to systematise information on cost sharing in the education sector. It is also telling that MoEC never commissioned research on the declining enrolment.

It is only in consultancy reports that the issue of enrolment is taken up. A large team involved in the appraisal of the ESDP, in which Wangwe participated, in fact recommended to abolish school fees (March 1999), but then MoEC responded defensively, arguing “that we cannot go back, anticipating that donors were still supportive of cost sharing” (Wangwe, interview).

The availability of quality empirical data is a basic problem. Consultancies are mostly done in a rush relying on poor and often unreliable statistics, and unsystematic and often anecdotal qualitative

data. Mosha (interview) confirmed the absence of solid, comprehensive studies. “Still, some people are good at blowing their trumpet”, he added, referring to his stay at the World Bank in 2002 when everybody talked about the big-bang effect on primary school enrolment in Uganda. “Now we realise there was a lot of ghost data”.

Mosha is concerned that Tanzania now increases its public debt to finance primary education. He also holds the view that there is no need for a blanket removal of fees, since there are quite a number of able parents, while he advocated a need to focus more on the quality of education and those already in the schools. “We should focus more on output data, not just enrolment”.

According to Malekela (interview) there was a high awareness in some districts on the need to contribute to education. E.g. in districts supported by Dutch aid people had responded effectively with community contributions. The same is reported from districts under World Bank’s Community Education Fund, with a facility to provide matching grants to local contributions. The sudden abolition of school fees, according to Malekela, has confused people and leaders, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to mobilise local contributions. “Those with ability to pay should continue to pay. Many in rural areas can afford paying fees, and many are now sending kids to private schools.”

There are a number of significant factors that kept children out of school (Malekela) and school fees are not among them: poor school environment; economic depression and opportunity costs to child labour; lowly qualified teachers; and poor educational outputs after seven years with extremely few opportunities to enter secondary education.

A general argument is that poor families decide not to send children to school because the opportunity costs of child labour are too high. Children are needed in agriculture and livestock keeping, housekeeping and supporting elderly and ailing family members, and income generation through petty trade. Some argue that this situation remains unchanged. Where we have seen a change is in the perceived usefulness of schools, much influenced by the strong opening of private secondary schools coupled with a greater political commitment to education among national and local political leaders (Galabawa, interview). It follows from this that an increasing number of families are willing to invest in education. Galabawa is concerned with the longer term financial sustainability of the basic education system. Rather than a blanket removal of school fees, one should have tried a voucher system for the poor, handled by local government. At least about 60% were paying the fees, and could afford to continue paying. In other words, Galabawa challenges the mainstream view that schools fees have been a major deterrent on enrolment; and vice versa, that the removal of the fees explains the rapid increase in 2002/2003.

Mushi has been involved in several evaluations of the Community Education Fund, and reports that non-income factors were the most significant barriers to school participation (interview). In particular, it was observed that political pressure was the main factor explaining increased enrolment. He also holds the view, shared by many in the research community, that the current policy for financing primary education is unsustainable and leads towards increased aid dependency. “There is too much cutting in taxes.”

Semboja (interview) also stated he was not aware of any serious studies on the effects of cost-sharing in primary education, noting that school fees are a small portion of cost sharing. There is no hard evidence documenting inability to pay, and press reports cannot be relied upon as evidence. “Why then make the UPE fee a culprit?” Sustainability, according to Semboja, does not arise in budgetary terms in the short run, since very little was actually collected, but is an issue in another sense. Investment per child has to go up to ensure quality. Parental contributions or other forms of local taxation would be essential to achieve this increase. He also reiterated the view that deepening

aid dependency in primary education is a highly problematic. “What will happen when donors withdraw?”

## **The role of domestic research in the process of changing the policy on user fees**

Undoubtedly, the school fee was resented among parents; much the same as with the development levy and other direct taxes levied at household level. The problem was not so much the amount of money involved, although for the poorest households this was also a genuine problem, but lack of accountability. Parents saw no direct results from the payment, as in most cases it was treated as general revenue by the district administration. It is not known to what extent this resentment was increasing throughout the 1990s, but other factors definitely changed.

Alonso-Illterme calls it “the coming of many streams to form a river”. The other streams were NGO activism in Tanzania as well as in the North, the PRSP process, and the turn-around of the Tanzanian government and the donor community on the issue of school fees (Alonso Illterme 2002:2). The Tanzanian research community is not on the list, and rightly so. But which of these streams carried most water?

There is no doubt that those were the international ones. As already mentioned, Government’s education policy of 1995 was advocating cost sharing, and MoEC had not changed its position despite recommendations in the ESDP planning process and the Education Sector Country Status Report (Buretta, Assey, Galabawa interviews) to revise the system. But a political constituency for doing something on education was building up, spurred by external influence building on the Jomtien and Dakar declarations and not least the new emphasis on poverty reduction through the HIPC and PRSP processes. This also resonated well with leading politicians in Tanzania, including President Mkapa himself. Election time was coming and removing the school fee would definitely be well received.

But according to most observers, it was the World Bank that made the difference. When the Bank’s Country Director, Jim Adams, announced to the President directly that the Bank had changed its position on user fees in primary education and was prepared to finance the shortfall in revenue there was quickly a meeting of minds. This happened at the time when the penultimate draft of the PRSP document (September 2000) was reviewed by President’s Office. When this office decided to insert in the document a commitment to abolish school fees it came as a surprise, not least to MoEC. The Permanent Secretary of MoEC even publicly stated after the release of the final PRSP that it must be a mistake.

In a recently submitted Ph.D. dissertation Holtom makes the following observation of the PRSP process in Tanzania: “Bank involvement continued, most controversially over the decision to abolish user fees for primary education – arguably the only new policy in the PRSP – and somewhat brazenly hailed as one of the ‘successes’ of the PRSP by the Bank ... was apparently inserted at the Bank’s behest. This was not only a major public relations coup for the Bank (keen to raise its poverty profile through support for Universal Primary Education) but also paved the way for a \$150 million primary education sector loan (in the face of bilateral opposition). The move would cement Bank leadership in the sector” (Holtom 2003:249).

Holtom further observes that the decision to abolish user fees for primary education was not only made at a very late stage, but also inserted between drafts, reported to be “out of a planning void”

according to one of Holtom's interviewees, Johnny Baxter, Education Advisor, DFID Tanzania (Holtom 2003:271).

It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the reasons prompting the change in the Bank's view, while still, for instance, resisting similar steps in the health sector. Many do argue that cost sharing in the health sector is far more anti-poor than school fees. Obviously, international research played a role (Burns et al 2003), together with the morally charged "rights to development" agenda, but national research was not drawn upon, nor national researchers consulted.

The history of the national policy debate in Tanzania on user fees on primary education can be seen to cover at least two distinguishable, and competing, policy discourses. One is the 'Arusha discourse' of which free primary education was an integral part. Another is the 'neo-liberal discourse' underlying the structural adjustment reforms introduced in the mid-1980s. However, none of these two discourses seem to encompass the decision by Government to abolish user fees. Holtom (2003:274) suggests that "unlike macroeconomic policy making, there is no single unifying discourse or epistemic community to help drive policy forward [in the education sector]". However, he suggests that an important discourse currently in vogue in Tanzania, is a 'transnational consensus on poverty reduction' largely driven by the World Bank and bilateral donors, in concert with upper echelons of Government technocrats and an epistemic community of (largely) economists in Dar es Salaam. But as documented above, it is evident that on the issue of user fees the view of this epistemic community is ambivalent and not one of consensus.

Mbilinyi (1999) asks the questions: "To what extent have educational researchers in Tanzania and other African countries been part of the paradigm shift towards a more qualitative understanding of research and education? Or have we marginalised ourselves and remain bound by past orthodoxies? If the latter, why?" (Mbilinyi 1999:51). She partly gives the answer herself when she refers to the material conditions of research in Tanzania. Most research is funded by external agencies on short-term contract basis, and there is hardly any funding for long term basic research. The case of policymaking dealt with in this paper amply illustrates Mbilinyi's point. Although she clearly supports the decision to abolish school fees, her observation is valid. We cannot find any long term basic research on this issue and in the little that is published the shadow of the sponsoring agency is often evident.

Professor Amani, Director of ESRF – a leading policy research centre in Tanzania, confirmed that the research community had not been a driving force behind the policy reform. But more alarming is that nobody has been looking for alternative options – between no fees and fees for all, Amani says (interview). This is the challenge where domestic research-based knowledge would have been essential. A blanket removal of fees is easily justified in simple paradigmatic terms, whereas designing ways of exempting the poor or targeting subsidies would require in-depth knowledge about local conditions.

Several interviewees commented on the uneasy relationship between policymakers and researchers all the way from the time of Nyerere. He himself expressed a sceptical attitude towards the *wasomi* ("the learned"). This, however, cannot explain the marginalisation of research in our case. Kalugula (interview), no longer with MoEC, clearly pointed at the external influence: "We had to accept what came to us. We adopt and adapt." And World Bank showed its financial muscles when the PEDP loan agreement was developed.

Galabawa (interview) claimed that they had been arguing against blanket removal and were shocked by the sudden decision. "How are we going to sustain the input to education? Why do the Bank want this? They do not promote self reliance." On the other hand, it is also symptomatic for the role

of research in Tanzania that a leading expert like Galabawa was never called upon by MoEC to assist in negotiations with the World Bank.

## Conclusions

We have argued that in aid dependent countries reforms more frequently take place in the form of paradigmatic shifts, largely influenced by changes in donor policies. Problems of implementation, however, are often not properly addressed and remain largely unaffected by new reforms. The distance between proclaimed objectives and actual achievements is therefore dramatically wide. The education sector in Tanzania is a case in point. We see a pattern of moving from crisis to crisis and few examples of policy change in the form of incremental improvements. We assume that incremental change is more common in countries where policy making is less conditioned by external conditionality and donors' powers of the purse.

The main point of this article has been to investigate the role of domestic research in such a system of policymaking. The study shows that research has particular problems in becoming relevant and used in this system. We draw the following main conclusions from our interviews and review of literature:

- Tanzanian educational researchers did not influence the paradigmatic shift in Government's policy towards school fees in primary schools. The decision was mainly a result of external pressure, although domestic opposition worked in the same direction.
- From what they publish Tanzanian educational researchers seem to be stuck in old paradigms. Dependency on donor funding for consultancy and short-term research is a major factor explaining this.
- Government remains ambivalent towards actively using Tanzanian educational researchers in their negotiations with influential donors, still being far from embracing evidence-based policymaking.
- International development agencies, and notably the World Bank, clearly give primacy to international knowledge over domestic.
- Several prominent Tanzanian researchers oppose the decision to go for blanket removal of school fees, being concerned with longer term effects in terms of financial sustainability and self-reliance. These arguments were effectively suppressed by the new poverty and MDG agenda, searching for measures that quickly would improve enrolment figures.

With respect to enrolment, the reform has been an apparent success. Still, Tanzanian educational researchers warn against believing the removal of the school fee was the main factor. Which means that enrolment will again drop unless the root causes to drop-out are addressed: combating misuse of funds, reduction in income poverty and strengthening community and parental involvement. The irony is that if these factors had been improving in the first place the need for blanket removal of the UPE fee would not have been there.

## Annex: People interviewed (Dar es Salaam, 19-27 May, 2004)

### Researchers

Name	Institution/position
Amani, Haidari K. R	Professor, Executive Director, ESRF
Cooksey, Brian	Director, Tanzania Development Research Group
Erhart, Charles	Former Research Fellow, ESRF
Galabawa, Justinian C. J.	Professor and Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM)
Malekela, George A.	Professor, Faculty of Education, UDSM
Mosha, Paul	Asst. Dean, Faculty of Education, UDSM
Mushi, Deo	Department of Economics, UDSM
Semboja, Joseph	Director, REPOA
Wangwe, Samuel M.	Professor, Principal Research Fellow, ESRF

### Policymakers

Name	Institution/position
Assey, Pascal B.	Poverty Eradication Division, Vice President's Office
Buretta, B.N.V.	Director of Secondary Education, MoEC
Kalugula, Charles	Former Director of Policy and Planning, MoEC
Likwelile, Servacius B.	Director, Poverty Eradication Division, Vice President's Office
Mhaiki, Oliver	Director Primary Education, MoEC
Miyedu	Acting Director of Policy and Planning, MoEC
Mukai, Cletus	National Bureau of Statistics
Mwaimu, Ally S.M.	Head, Budgeting Section & Policy Department, MoEC
Odunga, S.	Former Secretary, MoEC

### Other stakeholders

Name	Institution/position
Ibrahim, Abdallah	Liaison Officer, Kuleana
Kaabwe, Stella	UNICEF, Tanzania
Laswey, Rest	World Bank, Tanzania
Rajani, Rakesh	Director, HakiElimu
Tukai, Illuminata	Project Officer, Education, UNICEF Tanzania
Van de Male, Pim	Monitoring & Education Unit, UNDP Tanzania

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## SUMMARY

Tanzania abolished school fees in primary schools as from 2002. This move was made possible because of shifts in the policy of major donors, not least the World Bank. In the subsequent years Tanzania recorded a rapid increase in enrolment rates. It is generally argued that fees in primary education turn away children from school, but researchers disagree on the relative importance of this effect. In this paper we use this case of policy reform to study the role of research. Was this an example of evidence-based policy making? If so, where did the evidence come from? Our main focus was on the role of national researchers and findings from relevant research on Tanzania. The study shows that this research has had particular problems in becoming relevant and used, and identify the major factors that can explain its marginal role.

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